

Stratham Land Conservation Criteria

Developed by the Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee

Developed by the Stratham Conservation Commission 2020

These criteria were revised in 2020 by members of the Stratham Conservation Commission for the purpose of evaluating and ranking potential properties for land conservation. The previous 2002 Stratham Land Conservation Criteria developed by the Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee and the 2019 Town Master plan guided the Commission in developing these criteria. The Stratham Conservation Commission discussed with other boards and committees including the Planning Board, Select Board and Town Administrator, Parks and Recreation Department, Heritage Commission, Pedestrian & Cyclist Advocacy Committee (PCAC), and Park Association assure that the criteria developed also met the overall goals for town development and preservation.

The evaluation criteria is used to determine if a property is suitable for funded conservation easement consideration. The Commission will decide in non-public session if a specific parcel meets the initial criteria characteristics. If the parcel meets at least three (3) initial evaluation criteria, conversations may then be continued with the landowner(s), the project recommended to the Selectmen, and the appraisal process started. Once the appraisal is complete, the Commission will then do a final evaluation of additional criteria and financial considerations before deciding whether or not to bring the property to the Selectmen and a public hearing.

Landowners will be given a copy of the criteria in advance. Discussions do not ensure that land will be funded for a conservation easement. **The bond** monies have been totally expended and the Conservation Commission now relies on the Land Conservation Fund, which is funded by land coming out of current use taxes, grant sources that may be utilized for matching funds, landowner gifting, and town votes for complete funding of projects.

Property Name:

Motivated Seller?

Initial evaluation/priorities

Property is adjacent to existing conservation land, land in the conservation process or other open space.

Public access will be included in the conservation easement.

Property allows the protection of natural resources and wildlife habitat.

Property can be reasonably converted to developed use(s).

Property is an important hydrological resource demonstrated by being located over a known (mapped) aquifer, and/or along mapped surface water (brook, river), and/or the property includes wetlands (swamp or marsh).

Final Evaluation

Properties should be evaluated by the number of values identified in Goals listed below. If multiple properties are being considered at the same time, the evaluations below may be used to guide a decision as to which property has the highest value and the best chance of funding at the lowest cost to the town.

Goal 1: Protect natural resources threatened by development pressures

- Section I: Soils and surface characteristics:
 - Parcel is predominantly farmland of prime and statewide significance
 - Parcel is predominantly farmland of local significance, or high-quality forestland on agricultural soils
 - Parcel is predominantly forestland of lower quality, or forestland on non-agricultural soils

- Section II: Water resources:
 - Parcel is part of Wetlands Conservation District or Shoreline Protection District
 - Conservation of parcel serves as a buffer to surface waters, significant wetlands or vernal pools
 - Parcel includes frontage on a perennial, year-round stream, brook, or river
 - Parcel serves as a recharge to a ground water aquifer, water supply watershed or near a well-field

- Section III: Wildlife habitat:
 - Parcel includes a combination of open, wooded, and wetlands (offering transition zones)
 - Parcel includes important wildlife habitat or rare/endangered species
 - A natural resources inventory has been conducted on the property and indicates unique characteristics

- Section IV: Defined conservation priority areas:
 - Parcel is located in the Stratham open space or Regional Open Space Plan "Greenway"
 - Parcel is located in the Great Bay Coastal Zone Management Area
 - Preservation of this property addresses concerns identified in the State of Our Estuaries 2018 report prepared by the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP)

Goal 2: Enhance passive, nature-oriented recreational opportunities and public access areas

- Parcel offers public access
- Trails exist on the parcel
- Parcel offers parking for public access area
- Parcel offers public access to surface waters (for boating, or fishing, swimming, etc.)
- **Parcel offers public access with potential for outdoor recreational opportunities**
- Parcel enhances the Stratham Safe Routes to School Action Plan (2019) identified in the 2019 Stratham Master Plan

Goal 3: Protect rural and scenic beauty, cultural and historic resources

- Parcel is visible to general public
- Parcel includes unique and/or highly valued views
- Historic elements (historic home, barn, stone walls, or archaeological site) exist

Goal 4: Build larger blocks and corridors of protected lands

- Section I: Proximity of subject parcel to other conservation lands:
 - Parcel is adjacent to existing conservation or town-owned land
 - Parcel is near existing conservation or town-owned land
 - Parcel is adjacent to another current conservation project
 - Parcel is near another current conservation project
 - Parcel has the potential to lay the foundation for connectivity between parcels
- Section II: Size of subject parcel:
 - Parcel includes over 75 acres
 - Parcel includes 25 acres or more
 - Parcel includes 10 acres or more

Goal 5: Address those changes in land use that undermine conservation values or may lead to an increased local tax burden

- Parcel has significant residential development potential
- Parcel has motivated seller so potential for sale to an outside entity is a possibility

Goal 6: Maximize land conserved per Town dollar spent

- Parcel is a strong candidate for outside grant funding
- The town has a partner ready to work with the landowner and Conservation Commission to provided funding
- Landowner and/or neighbors are willing to gift a portion of the appraised value
- Parcel represents a unique conservation opportunity at this time